

## **Gumbi wins FameLab South Africa 2016 award**

**A 26-year-old Nozipho Gumbi from Eshowe in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) scooped the International FameLab South Africa award at the recent finals in front of a capacity audience at the glittering Cape Town International Convention Centre, at the Going Global conference on Wednesday night (4 May 2016).**

The star of the show was Gumbi, who is currently studying nanotechnology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), was the overall favourite as she dazzled the audience and the judges with her engaging talk on water filtration using carbon nanotubes.

Gumbi's PhD research at the University of South Africa (UNISA) looks at ways of improving water purification using membrane filters. She says the types of pollutants finding their way into our water resources are constantly changing, so newer treatment methods need to be put into place.

She won R5000 in prize money and will be travelling to the United Kingdom to go up against over 30 country winners for the international title.

Gumbi's journey has only just begun. She will soon be packing her bags and jetting off to the United Kingdom for the FameLab International Finals hosted by Cheltenham Festivals. Humble, yet confident, Gumbi acknowledged the other candidates saying "each and every one of you could have been the winner tonight".

Runners up Claude Moshobane from Limpopo, currently working with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), discussed alien invasive plants and how they disrupt the ecosystem.

Also a runner up, Savannah Nuwagaba from Uganda, currently at Stellenbosch University, spoke about how mathematics is used to predict possible changes in animals' body size, depending on changes in their eating habits.

Ten finalists were brought to Cape Town and presented to the high-profile audience and judges, who included Dr Tollulah Oni (UCT school of Public Health), Dr Carolina Odman (Universe awareness Programme), Koki Selepe (Department of Science and Technology) and John Wade Smith (British High Commission). Quentin Cooper of the BBC and FameLab International played the role of MC.

The journey for the 10 finalists began earlier this year. Science communication training around the country was facilitated by Jive Media Africa, an independent science communication agency, and supported by the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) and the British Council in South Africa. Heats were held around the country – from Limpopo, to the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and the Western

Cape – with video entries providing an opportunity for those living far from a heat to participate.

Only 19 contestants were chosen to go through to the semi-finals which took place at the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre on 12th of March. There, the contestants all stepped up their presentations, leaving the judges with the very difficult task of selecting just 10 finalists.

FameLab is not just about fame however; this comes at a time when the importance of public engagement and discourse in science and technology is better recognised, as evidenced by the Department of Science and Technology’s Science Engagement Strategy. Science should serve society and can only do so if the public is able to engage with it. Unfortunately, scientific concepts and findings are not always communicated effectively to the public. This is what FameLab strives to address.

Through FameLab, diverse young scientists have been provided with the opportunity to improve their communications skills or discover their talent for communicating science, and engage with public audiences on varied science topics.

FameLab, referred to as a “Pop Idols for scientists” invites young scientists (21-35) to present their science in less than 3 minutes - developing their skills for engaging with the public.

### **FameLab Format**

The format of the FameLab competition requires participants to present a scientific topic or concept to a panel of expert judges in a time of no more than three minutes. Talks are judged on content, clarity and charisma. The challenge is that talks should be accurate and informative but also entertaining and original, all while making sure the public audience understands.

FameLab is an international competition and training programme designed to inspire, motivate and develop young scientists and engineers to actively engage with the public. With over 30 participating countries, worldwide, it has been dubbed the ‘Pop Idols of Science’!

Nozipho’s profile link below

<http://www2.saasta.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Nozipho-Gumbi.pdf>

Nozipho’s semi-finals YouTube video below

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBSZgjUGYWY>

FameLab in South Africa is made possible by a partnership between the British Council, the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement and Jive Media Africa.

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### **EDITORS’ NOTES**

#### **About the British Council:**

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.britishcouncil.org.za/>. You can also keep in touch with the British Council through <https://twitter.com/zaBritish>

### **About Jive Media Africa:**

Jive Media Africa creates innovative, cutting edge communications; grabbing attention and conveying crucial messages in accessible ways.

An award-winning multi-media company, Jive Media Africa produces media strategies and products that challenge and inform, making a difference in the areas of Science and Technology (Jive Science), Biodiversity Conservation (Jive Earth), Children in the context of HIV/ AIDS (Jive Children) and Human Rights (Jive People).

Jive Media Africa strategises the best combination of media for the message, and importantly, for the target audience.

For more information, please visit <http://jivemedia.co.za/>. You can also follow them on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JiveMediaAfrica>

### **About SAASTA:**

The South Africa Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) is a business unit of the National Research Foundation (NRF) with the mandate to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, engineering, innovation and technology in South Africa.

SAASTA's contribution to the NRF's vision is to grow the pool of quality learners today who will become the scientists and innovators of tomorrow.

All science engagement programmes within the NRF reside under three key strategic areas that combine to form an integrated and seamless approach.

Through education we build up the supply of tomorrow's scientists and innovators.

Through communication we celebrate South African achievements in science and technology and build the public's appreciation of the benefits of science.

By growing the awareness of science through exploration, exhibitions and actual experience, we instil in people an enthusiasm about the wonder and application of the subject, while encouraging greater public engagement in SET issues.

By taking overall ownership of science advancement initiatives within the NRF and on a countrywide scale, SAASTA is responding to an organisational as well as national imperative.

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